

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A method for separating a stack of sheets already formed from a stack being formed, during the production of paper products, comprising the steps of:
 - a) forming a stack of interfolded sheets piling up on a table located underneath;
 - b) separating two successive interfolded sheets once achieved a predetermined height of said forming stack and defining a completed stack and a forming stack;
 - c) said separating occurring by laterally introducing a first and a second separator into said stack being formed from opposite sides with respect to the stack same for separating the stack located underneath;
 - c1) said stack having a width and said two separators being introduced in said stack for about half of said width bearing together said stack being formed;
 - c2) said two separators leaving at least one wing of sheet hanging free between said two separators, said wing hanging at about half of said width;
 - d) moving away said completed stack of sheets from said table and leaving it on a conveyor belt or an outlet plane;
 - e) moving a sheet stretching board under the stack for all the stack width to provisionally support said stack and for stretching said or each wing for all the stack width, with an end portion of said wing eventually exceeding said sheet stretching board;
 - f) withdrawing said first and second separator up to reaching a position external to said stack being formed; and
 - g) moving back said table and withdrawing the sheet stretching board, with said portion of wing that remains between said stack and said table, wherein before moving back said table an element acting from a direction opposite to said sheet stretching board stretches said portion of wing of sheet exceeding said sheet stretching board.

2. (cancelled)

3. (currently amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein a step is provided of making an end fold on the portion of said wing exceeding said sheet stretching board by means of both an said element acting from the opposite side to said sheet stretching board and an element acting from the same side of said sheet stretching board, just before coming back said table.

4. (previously presented) The method of Claim 3, wherein said element acting from the same side is a blow of air, and said element acting from the opposite side of said sheet stretching board is said second separator, said separator moving from a position outer to the stack, after that said sheet stretching board is positioned, to a position below the lower face of said sheet stretching board and in order to make the end fold on the exceeding portion of sheet by said blow of air.

5. (previously presented) The method of Claim 1, wherein previously to the step of moving away said completed stack on the conveyor belt, or in the outlet plane, a blow of air is provided for moving a possible last sheet that has remained in a vertical position bringing it to an horizontal position.

6. (currently amended) An apparatus for separating a stack of sheets already formed from a stack being formed during the production of paper products in interfolded stacks, comprising:

- a) means for feeding said stack being formed with a stream of interfolded sheets;
- b) a movable table for supporting said stack being formed for allowing progressively the growth of the stack and for moving away the formed stack;
- c) a first and a second separator that are moved laterally into said stack and from opposite sides with respect to the stack same for separating the stack located underneath and to leave at least one wing of sheet hanging free between said two separators; and
- d) a sheet stretching board and means for moving said sheet stretching board under the stack for all the stack width to provisionally support said stack and for stretching said or each wing for all the stack width, with an end portion of said wing eventually exceeding said sheet stretching board, wherein said sheet stretching board slides on a base integral to said support of said first separator in a direction orthogonal to said sliding direction operated by an actuator that causes it to move along this direction.

7. (currently amended) The apparatus of Claim 6, comprising, furthermore, an element acting moving from a direction opposite to said sheet stretching board, with respect to the processed stack, suitable for stretching said portion of wing of sheet exceeding said sheet stretching board just before coming back said table.

8. (currently amended) The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein said element moving acting from the opposite side of said sheet stretching board is a blow of air.

9. (previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein said first and second separator are engaged to a support operatively coupled to a connecting rod operated by a motor; said connecting rod rotating by means of a cam and causing the rotation about a first and a second pivot of an articulated quadrilateral associated to a movable carriage along a sliding direction.

10. (cancelled)

11. (previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein said table is located on a slide movable horizontally along a guide operated by an actuator.

12. (cancelled)